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Foreword

Thomas O'Connor

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Foreword

The focus of the special section of *Consensus* is on spirituality and health. Certainly, spirituality and health are current topics in the media, culture, research and academia. The written material is voluminous. Five articles are presented here on the subject. These articles cover some aspects of the topic and there is much more that is not presented here.

Doris Ullman, M.D., presents "Prayer and Faith, Health and Healing: Reflections of a Family Physician". She asks is prayer and faith helpful in healing? She also asks whether everyday spiritual practices can help in one's health? To both of these, she answers yes. Dr. Ullman examines some of the research on religion and health. She critiques some of the research in terms of methodology and theology. She draws on her experience as a family physician as well as a member of a congregation. While she believes that religions is good for your health, she cautions against believing that there is a causal relationship between religion and health. Good religion does not necessarily produce good health and vice versa. There are sick saints and healthy sinners. The relationship is correlative and not causal.

Glenn Empey, MDiv presents "Attachment Theory, Pastoral Ministry and Health: A Teaching Case Application". Rev. Empey summarizes the theory of John Bowlby on attachment and uses it to develop an understanding of healthy relationships in the pastoral context. Bowlby's theory is combined with an teaching case. The teaching case, developed by Rev. Empey, helps to understand and utilize Bowlby's attachment theory in a concrete pastoral situation. Readers are urged to consider the questions that are presented at the end for further reflection on the case. They are also invited to use these questions for reflecting on their own pastoral relationships.

The third article is by Betty Belm, R.N. on "Parish Nursing Ministry: Caring for Body, Mind and Spirit" Parish nursing arises out of the congregation and views the congregation as a place of health, healing and spiritual care. This article focuses on the spiritual care that the parish nurse offers in the congregation. Parish nursing is dependent on a congregational health council. The parish nurse is educator, leader, spiritual care giver and nurse. Betty Belm also shares some of her own journey as a parish nurse.

The fourth article is by Carol Penner, PhD "Sexual Assault, Resurrection and the Healing Community" Dr. Penner examines the experience of women who have been sexually assaulted. She investigates especially the impact of sexual assault on the spirit, the soul of the victim. Dr. Penner works from a feminist theological standpoint. She urges that congregations be places that the issue of sexual assault can be discussed. She outlines the positive and negative aspects of the congregation as a possible place of healing for the wound of sexual assault.

The fifth article by Thomas St. James O'Connor, ThD and Elizabeth Meakes, MTS is "Spirituality, Congregation and Health: A Family Therapy Perspective" Thomas O'Connor and Elizabeth Meakes present a family struggling with hurtful behaviour and change. They look at how the congregation especially the pastor might help. They define spirituality from the family therapy literature and offer some characteristics for a health in the family. They also outlines some interventions that a pastor or pastoral counsellor might use to help the specific family.

A number of common themes emerge from these five articles. First there are a variety of definitions of spirituality. Spirituality is described as meaning making, involving the transcendence, core values, linked to religion and a faith community. Spirituality is also described as going beyond religion. Spirituality is personal and resides in the uniqueness of each. The spiritual is what makes the person. Human spirit and spirituality are intimately connected and related to Spirit. Connection and healthy attachment are words used to define spirituality. Spirituality involves acts of kindness especially to those who are on the fringe. Attending worship, prayer, participating in the life of the congregation, reading sacred texts, enjoying nature and family and friends are considered part of spirituality. Spirituality is mystery and can not be controlled or ever completely comprehended. The list of words and images seems endless.

Second, there are a variety of understandings of health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as 'physical, mental and social well-being'. The Ontario Ministry of health in 1998 added "spiritual" to the WHO definition. Health also refers to more than the individual. Groups such as families, congregations, societies, governments, etc. can be healthy and/or sick. There are also different understandings of spiritual health. Spiritual health is impacted by physical

health and vice versa. However, none of the authors believe that the relationship is causal. Therein is mystery. Health has many definitions and nuances.

Third, this theme of spirituality and health is presented from a variety of standpoints. There are different professions represented by the writers of the articles: family physician, parish nurse, chaplains, family therapists, feminist theologian and pastoral theologian. The authors write from various Christian denominations: Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Mennonite. There is much written on this topic by non-Christian faith groups and persons who identify themselves as agnostic and atheist. Space did not allow presentation of these standpoints. Spirituality and health is a concern of everyone and every writer works from his/her particular context.

Fourth, all the authors have had education and training in the clinical area. All have been trained in hospitals and some continue to work there. This training in a hospital setting is shown by the value that each author places on research. The articles draw on scientific research in its many forms. This approach is called evidence-based for it seeks solid evidence for the relationship between spirituality and health. However, each of the authors sees the value of the congregational setting for fostering spirituality and health. The congregation in these papers comes out as a strong place for developing a healthy spirituality and a healthy body, a healthy mind and healthy relationships.

Special thanks to Elizabeth Meakes for helping with editing of these papers. I hope that you will enjoy this small banquet placed before you.

Thomas St. James O'Connor, ThD
Associate Professor, Pastoral Care and Counselling
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary